Testimony before the U.S. Election Assistance Commission

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Cost-Saving Practices for Election Management

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Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's discussion on cost saving practices in the business of managing elections.

As a lifelong employee of local government for over 30 years – both at the city level and the county, I have always strived to serve the public effectively and efficiently while operating within real world budget constraints. My mindset has always been to spend the taxpayers' money as if it were my own – looking for any and all ways to save money.

Managing elections provides a unique challenge - first, because of state and federal mandates; and second, because of the uniqueness of each election. I can vividly remember long discussions with budget officials when budgets were being cut countywide. The only problem for the election office was often those cuts were during a Presidential election year. Budget officials would take an across-the-board strategy and request that all departments slash their budgets by a certain percentage. It was very difficult to make everyone understand that election budgets need to be thought of in four-year cycles. Comparing last year's budget to next year's budget does not work because the single driving force of our annual budget was the number and type of elections, with Presidential elections being the largest, and consuming the largest amount of budget dollars.

That said, our office worked very hard to develop and implement innovative cost-saving techniques. When I look back on those efforts, I would put them all into two main categories:

- Developing partnerships, and

- Using technology

<u>Developing partnerships</u>

I love thinking of Election Day as a community-wide celebration of democracy! Looking to the community to develop those partnerships was our first step. When you have no money for advertising or public relations, you must find a way to get the word out at no cost. One way we used was to piggyback onto any publication that we could find that was already being published and distributed. These included:

- City and Chamber of Commerce newsletters
- Home Association publications
- School publications, etc.

If it was already being printed, we asked if we could include our information on how to register to vote, vote early, and find your polling place on Election Day. We also made it standard practice to include our web address on anything and everything that was printed or published – because any visitor to our web page represented cost savings to our office, especially because we developed and maintained our web page with existing staff.

We also developed our community and school outreach program at no cost. These efforts included speaking engagements at area schools and civic organizations – many of those were done by me as Election Commissioner. We developed our own handout materials, and took our show "on the road". These efforts truly paid off big time. We soon developed our Adopt a Polling Place Program in 1997; our bi-state corporate Making Voting Popular Program in 1998; and our Student Poll Worker Program in 2000. These programs continue in place and provide an outstanding resource for voter education and poll worker recruitment.

Soon, we took it to the next level with our Celebrate Patriotism non-profit foundation, managed by a Board of Directors including representatives from the League of Women Voters, Community College, School Districts, corporations, etc. Through private donations we funded several successful voter outreach programs, of which my most favorite was the Celebrate the Vote program. This program provided supplies to area grade schools for students to design their own VOTE signs, which they would place either in their home front yard or on their school grounds the night before Election Day. Again, the vision was a community-wide celebration of patriotism! And, since many of our grade schools also served as polling places, you can just imagine voters driving up to vote and seeing a yard full of hand made VOTE signs greeting them.

Of course, we all know that the resources of every election office are stretched to the max on Election Day. Finding a way to supplement our work force and still stay within our budget was a constant challenge. We looked within our own county government and city government to supplement our needs.

- City and county staff members volunteered to serve as "openers" and "closers" on Election Day to assist poll workers in utilizing new voting equipment.

- County maintenance employees partnered with our office by building handicapped accessible ramps and parking signs for polling places. The night before Election Day, employees from that department were dispatched to polling places with these supplies, ensuring that everything was already in place when the poll workers arrived on election morning.

- Corrections staff brought overnight "offenders" to clean our warehouse floor after every election cycle.

- Information technology staff members teamed with our office to provide additional support to our early voting locations, to polling places during Election Day and internally within our office on Election night.

We also, of course, nurtured and developed a strong partnership with the media – radio, newspaper, television. Any time we could get a story about elections printed in the newspaper, seen on television, or played over the radio, was a benefit to our office at no cost.

In 2004 we took partnerships again to the next level with our Partners in Democracy program. This program reached out countywide to find new locations for polling places and to support our efforts on Election Day. All partners were recognized by our office and our County Commissioners in a public meeting where they were awarded our Partners in Democracy certificates.

Using technology

Again, when I think about the change that occurred during my tenure as Election Commissioner, the one word that describes it is TECHNOLOGY.

It began with development of our office's first web page, which was launched in January 1996. There, for the first time voters could view and print their sample ballot and voters, candidates and the media could view election results. Since our web page was created and updated by existing staff, it was truly a no cost solution which resulted in fewer phone calls. Now, 13 years later we all know that the web has become the 24 hour a day, 7 day a week information link for voters, candidates and the media. Voters can check their voter registration status, find their polling place and even view a map that tells them how to get there – available to them at any time at their convenience. The web will continue to become the virtual election office, where voters will register to vote and confirm that their ballot has been received in the mail.

As election offices moved from mainframe technology to desktop technology, the door opened wide to new opportunities and ways to use that technology to streamline workflow and increase efficiencies in all areas of the process.

- Scanning voter registration applications and doing data entry from the scanned image eliminated the manual process of hand alphabetizing these paper cards. This resulted not only in cost savings but in staff efficiencies because every voter registration image was available at any time to any staff member right there on their desktop computer.

- Easy access to all kinds of data contained in new voter registration software provides election offices the necessary tools to develop voter turnout projections, leading to possible consolidation of polling places. The old practice of opening the same number of polling places for every election is now changing in many jurisdictions. Polling places are opened based on the expected voter turnout and voters are notified and educated that polling places may and do change. The polling place notification card mailed out to voters is now also a voter educational card, reminding voters of Election Day, voter registration deadlines, and early voting hours and locations, as well as their new Election Day polling place.

- Integrating GIS software with the voter registration software provides the ability the download new census boundaries and data, allowing for seamless integration of new boundaries into the voter registration data file. With the touch of a few keys, voters can be assigned to new districts, replacing the old method of updating each segment of a street file by hand.

- Bar code technology provides quick and fast updating of voter records, receipt of mail ballot envelopes, and inventorying of equipment and supplies.

- Electronic poll books replace paper alphabetized lists, and quickly streamline the voter check-in process on Election Day. Updating voter history after the election is done by simply downloading the voter data, again replacing the previous method of hand data entry.

Technology certainly has and will continue to be the one tool that empowers election officials to implement innovative cost-saving solutions. As these solutions are developed and tested at the local county level, and are shared nationwide, we all benefit from lessons learned and new ideas pioneered by our colleagues around the country.

In closing, I want to talk about one issue that I feel very strongly about and that is planning for the future. If there is one thing that I could change in government offices, it is reacting instead of planning. In elections, we know that every four

years we must conduct a Presidential election. We also now know that voting technology is changing and equipment and software will need to be replaced in the future. I am a strong believer that every election office should have a designated contingency fund where money is budgeted every year as a savings account for the Presidential election. In that same regard, replacement funds must be established for voting equipment, desktop computers, and software upgrades. Equipment replacement plans must be developed with a designated dollar amount automatically budgeted for that fund every year.

With a designated contingency fund and equipment replacement fund, election offices can better manage their future needs, while continuing to develop innovative cost savings along the way.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.